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Security Council

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Statement by the President of the Security Council

At the 5131st meeting of the Security Council, held on 25 February 2005, in connection with the Council's consideration of the item entitled "Cross-border issues in West Africa", the President of the Security Council made the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council has carefully reviewed the Progress Report of the Secretary-General (S/2005/86) dated 11 February 2005, on the implementation of the recommendations of the Council on cross-border and subregional problems in West Africa and reaffirms the statement of its President, S/PRST/2004/7 of 25 March 2004.

"The Council notes with appreciation the enhanced cooperation among the various United Nations political and peace-keeping missions in the subregion and looks forward to receiving the Secretary-General's forthcoming report on intermissions cooperation. The Council also welcomes the growing and constructive partnership between the United Nations system, Economic Organization of West African States (ECOWAS), individual Member States, key bilateral and multilateral development partners, as well as civil society organizations, including women's organizations, aimed at addressing the many complex challenges confronting the West African subregion.

"The Council reiterates its belief that action on cross-border and subregional issues should take place as part of a wider strategy of conflict prevention, crisis management and peace-building in the subregion. The Council thus also encourages the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) further to promote an integrated and joint subregional approach with ECOWAS and the African Union, as well as with other key international partners and civil society organizations.

"The Council welcomes the encouraging prospects for the reactivation of the Mano River Union and the resumption of dialogue among its Member States, notably on ways to deal with mercenaries. It also welcomes initiatives taken by ECOWAS, to establish a Small Arms Unit and to adopt a new Small Arms Control Programme (ECOSAP) and its ongoing efforts to transform the Moratorium signed in Abuja on 31 October 1998, on the import, export and manufacture of small arms and light weapons, into a binding convention.

"The Council welcomes the decision of the European Commission on 2 December 2004 to assist ECOWAS in implementing its plans to combat the

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illicit dissemination of small arms. The Council reiterates its call on all Member States and Organizations, in a position to do so, to extend further assistance to ECOWAS in this field. The Council calls on arms producing and exporting countries and West African States to explore ways in which they can ensure the implementation of the Moratorium.

"The Council calls on Member States and key international partners to explore practical ways of assisting ECOWAS in enhancing its capacities in the areas of conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacekeeping, including through the provision of technical expertise, training programmes, and logistical and financial resources. In this connection, the Council reaffirms the crucial importance of the reintegration of ex-combatants, taking into account the special needs of child soldiers and women, in order to reverse the culture of violence and create an enabling environment for national reconciliation in countries emerging from conflict, and reiterates its call to the international community to provide adequate funding to this end.

"The Council underlines that ongoing or emerging crises in West Africa are a threat to the subregional stability and, in this regard, notes with deep concern the tensions emerging and ongoing in some countries over the transfer of power, involving members of security and armed forces, and which may further obstruct efforts to stabilize the subregion.

"The Council recalls in this regard the African Union position on unconstitutional changes of governments, as stated in the 1999 Algiers Declaration and the 2000 Lomé Declaration.

"The Council welcomes the action taken by ECOWAS and the African Union to address these issues.

"The Council expresses its deep concern about the involvement of individuals including those from security and armed forces in such illicit activities as smuggling of arms, drugs and natural resources, human trafficking, extortion at roadblocks and money laundering, in the context of mismanagement in the administration of justice, and weak government capacity to fight against criminal activities and impunity. The Council stresses the need to pay special attention to those critical issues that have direct bearing on efforts to enhance peace, stability and democratic governance in West African countries.

"The Council emphasizes the need to pursue security sector reforms aiming at improving civil-military relations in countries emerging from conflict situations and creating a culture of peace and stability and promoting the rule of law. In this regard, the Council requests the UNOWA to further explore with interested governments and organizations ways in which security sector reforms could be formulated and implemented.

"In this regard, the Council welcomes the ongoing efforts of ECOWAS, in collaboration with the United Nations Office of Drug Control, to improve border control mechanisms in West Africa by facilitating the flow of information among national law enforcement authorities, as well as regional networking and cooperation in the law enforcement issues.

"The Council reiterates the importance of curbing the growing risks of instability along some border areas. The Council, therefore, encourages UNOWA to facilitate, in close cooperation with the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat and its member States concerned, the implementation of strategies developed for sensitive border zones in the subregion and calls on the donors to support these efforts.

"The Council stresses the need to help West African States to curb illicit cross-border activities and to strengthen the capacities of the civil society groups working to promote a cross-border culture of non-violence and peace.

"The Council further emphasizes the need to generate economic activities and foster development as a means of promoting sustainable peace in the subregion. It urges international donors to assist ECOWAS States to address that need.

"The Council reaffirms the urgency of finding lasting solutions to the problem of youth unemployment in order to prevent the recruitment of such youth by illegal armed groups. In this connection, the Council requests the Secretary-General to include in his next progress report practical recommendations on how best to tackle the problem of youth unemployment.

"The Council urges the donor countries, international organizations and civil society to address the dire humanitarian situation in many parts of the subregion and to provide adequate resources in the framework of the Consolidated Appeals Process 2005 for West Africa as part of a regional humanitarian response strategy to improve the human security of the people in dire need of protection or those whose coping capacities are close to exhaustion.

"The Council expresses its intention to keep these issues under review and requests the Secretary-General to report on them regularly through his reports on the United Nations missions in the subregion."